

January 2004 Wild Turkey Distribution

Wild turkeys are an important component of Michigan's natural resources. As such, they are managed in an attempt to maintain social and ecological carrying capacities through the annual spring and fall hunting seasons.

Population goals are set to maintain turkey numbers within social carrying capacity. Social carrying capacity, in its simplest form, can be defined as the number of wild turkeys that produces acceptable levels of benefits (e.g., harvest and viewing) and reduces problems to tolerable levels (e.g., nuisance and crop damage). Indicators of social carrying capacity are developed from data regarding social concerns. Each year management strategies such as spring and fall turkey quotas are established based on hunter surveys, harvest information, and social carrying capacity. One method used to assess the status of populations is the winter turkey survey conducted in January.

Winter counts take advantage of the tendency for wild turkeys to form stable flocks and experience restricted movement during periods of heavy snowfall. Many flocks congregate around food sources ranging from supplemental feed sites to agricultural fields. In those areas where turkeys do not readily congregate into major winter flocks, additional methods have been used to determine county population sizes. These methods utilize statistical evaluation of harvest and life history along with visual observations.

Michigan's biologists rely upon a network of interested individuals reporting the locations of turkey flocks. A statement in the Wild Turkey Hunting Guide and press release inform the public that biologists are requesting this information. Individuals may contact the Wildlife Division or report their observation on a web page dedicated to recording wild turkey sightings. Submittal of information is voluntary and remains confidential. At the end of January, biologists compile these reports and are able to estimate a minimum number of turkeys in their area.

